

A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Beatrix Jones Farrand 1872-1959

Beatrix Jones Farrand's achievement as a landscape architect is intimately related to her experience as a long resident of Mt. Desert Island. At the age of eighteen she observed the laying out of the grounds of her family's summer place, Reef Point at Bar Harbor. Reef Point became, after her marriage to Max Farrand, her principal office and home and later the site of one of the most ambitious projects of her professional life. Farrand designed over forty gardens on Mt. Desert. Approximately one third of these were damaged or destroyed by the fire which raged through Bar Harbor in October, 1947. Other gardens at Seal Harbor and Northeast Harbor have suffered through neglect. Still others like her own experimental gardens at Reef Point were dismantled after World War II for economic reasons. Fortunately several of Farrand's gardens remain as living evidence of her genius as a designer.

Beatrix Jones Farrand was born in New York City in 1872, the only child of Mary Cadwalader Rawle and Frederick Rhineland Jones. Her parents were di-

vorced before she was twelve. Tutors at home within the protected atmosphere and "mild and melancholy glamour" of Washington Square, she often traveled abroad with her mother and with her aunt, that omnivorous traveler and garden lover Edith Wharton. At twenty she studied landscape design and horticulture under Charles Sprague Sargent, founder and director of the Arnold Arboretum. Although she later developed her own philosophy of design, she always followed Sargent's advice "to make the plan fit the ground and not twist the ground to make the plan".

It was during this formative period that Jones published her first known article on landscape gardening. This 1893 essay, entitled "Nature's landscape—garden in Maine", bears quoting here in part as it indicates Jones' early preference for native materials and picturesque effects:

Every lover of nature must have noticed how beautiful the edge of a wood is in early summer, when the dark branch of an evergreen throws out the paler green of some deciduous neighbor. In the clearing and planting which are necessary on some places every year, should we not try to get like effects? . . . To give an effect of distance on a small place, why could we not plant a line of dark, thick foliated trees on distant points, then leave a space, planting a second grove of smaller light foliated trees? The space will give distance and depth to the background while the darker green trees, if placed on the most distant height, are valuable at sunset, as they always seem to keep the last light. If there is to be a large lawn, it is well to keep in mind that the creeping shadows made by trees planted on the western edge will be very beautiful in the long summer afternoons. It will be noticed that only such trees grow on the coast of Maine, as I am most familiar with that part of the country.¹

Encouraged by Sargent to become a professional, Jones began taking private commissions in 1896. To this period belongs Jones' drawing for Lych Gate, Seal Harbor (Figure 1). This charming and spirited watercolor indicates Jones' preference for well crafted architectural detail and for pictorial effects. Her early efforts gained her immediate recognition. Commenting on her work for Edgar Scott in 1896, the *Bar Harbor Record* observed:

Every one interested in woman's work is watching with interest this decidedly new and quite ambitious departure of Miss Jones from the conventional woman's sphere. It is the first instance of a woman, a young, attractive society girl in reality, taking upon herself such a mammoth task, but she is certainly carrying it through most commendably, shirking none of the hard and disagreeable details, and handling big crews of men with great tact and dignity.²



Figure 4. The Guardian Wall (now called the Spirit Path), The Eyrie Garden, 1960 view (Ezra Stoller, photographer).

remains in partial effect to this day. Farrand's *Road Notes* of 1930 provide a revealing glimpse of the high level of attention and imagination which she brought to this enterprise. Here the discriminating mind and eye for constructive detail were brought to bear on the design process:

Add pines at the Duck Brook Bridge, both sides of the bridge and both sides of the stream, keeping the existing stumps and trying as nearly as may be possible to keep the two good views of the triple arches from the approach roads.

As a good foreground to the bay view use heavy groups of wild rose and Diervilla and sweet fern. These will never grow high enough to interfere with the prospect but will make an attractive and clean foreground.

West of the Witchole bare roadside banks would be greatly improved by spruce and pine planting, especially on the grade above the road. Note that sweet fern is excellent to add to planting — where low effects are desired . . .⁵

Here too were revealed Farrand's intimate knowledge of native Maine plant materials as well as her complete understanding of the topographic subtleties of the site.

At the very heart and center of Farrand's life at Mt. Desert is Reef Point Gardens, an ambitious project which she and her husband began some twenty years before his death (Figures 5, 6). Designed on the six acre site of Farrand's summer home for both scholarly and experimental purposes, it was thought that Reef Point would provide a major center for the study of north-eastern New England flora.⁶ As conceived the gardens were to have offered unusual opportunities to a small number of landscape students for the study of National

Park design and management, using Acadia National Park as a laboratory. Reef Point ultimately included a test garden of native flora, including a rare collection of heaths, a library which included the original garden plans of Gertrude Jekyll, and an herbarium. This visionary scheme lasted only a few years. In 1955 Farrand, concerned about the future of Reef Point, decided to transfer the contents of the library, the herbarium, and her own professional correspondence to the University of California at Berkeley. The house was torn down, and the gardens dismantled. Shrubs and trees were carefully moved to other locations, including the Thuja Gardens and the Asticou Gardens at Northeast Harbor. Robert Patterson, Trustee of the Gardens, later wrote that "Bar Harbor had begun to change after the 1947 fire" and that Farrand's "fear was that in the course of time Reef Point might become another attraction for tourists . . . what Mrs. Farrand saw was a pervasive lowering of values. She was a perfectionist, and she obliterated an important part of her life's work rather than risk its continuation in some form which would not measure up to her standard of excellence . . ."⁷ Beatrix Farrand died at Bar Harbor four years later.

The recent revival of interest in Farrand's work has prompted the restoration of several gardens at Mt. Desert. First of these is the cottage garden designed originally for Mildred McCormick at Bar Harbor in 1923. The garden, including perennial beds and a vegetable garden enclosed by high cedar hedge, is currently under restoration by the owner Mrs. Sargent



Figure 5. Reef Point Gardens, Bar Harbor, circa 1945 view (Courtesy of the College of Environmental Design Documents Collection, University of California, Berkeley).

Collier. The rose garden designed for J. Byrne at Bar Harbor in 1928 and now owned by the College of the Atlantic is being restored by Patrick Chassé, a Northeast Harbor landscape architect. The original design is to be much simplified for modern use and the grass parterre partly replaced by stone. A garden designed originally for Christian Herter sometime between 1902 and 1913 at Seal Harbor is also in process of restoration by the present owners Dr. and Mrs. James Murphy. Here, situated high above Seal Harbor, one of Farrand's earliest designs for a terraced perennial border and stone walk has been revived according to original plans now preserved at the University of California as a fitting tribute to the designer who learned from Mt. Desert more than any other place "how to keep time with Nature".⁸

Eleanor M. McPeck



Figure 6. Reef Point Gardens, circa 1945 view (Courtesy of the College of Environmental Design Documents Collection, University of California, Berkeley).

NOTES

- ¹ Beatrix Jones, *Garden and Forest*, September 6, 1893, p. 378.
- ² *Bar Harbor Record*, September 30, 1896.
- ³ Beatrix Jones, "The Garden as a Picture", *Scribner's Magazine*, July, 1907, pp. 2-11.
- ⁴ Eleanor M. McPeck, "The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden, Seal Harbor, Maine (1926-1950)", *Beatrix Farrand's American Landscapes, Her Gardens and Campuses*, Sagaponack, New York, 1985, pp. 44-53.
- ⁵ John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Road Notes, November 4, 1930, Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, New York.
Ann Rockefeller Roberts, *Mr. Rockefeller's Roads*, Camden, 1990.
- ⁶ Reef Point Gardens, Notes, September 16, 1939, Farrand Collection, University of California, Berkeley.
- ⁷ Robert Patterson, Letter to *Bar Harbor Times*, February 18, 1985.
- ⁸ Beatrix Jones, "The Garden as a Picture", *Scribner's Magazine*, July, 1907, pp. 2-11.

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY BEATRIX FARRAND

The following list of Beatrix Farrand's Maine projects is based upon the compilation of her commissions from 1891 to 1949 found in *Beatrix Farrand's American Landscapes, Her Gardens and Campuses* by Diana Balmori, Diane Kostial McGuire, and Eleanor M. McPeck, Sagaponack, New York, 1985, and the research of Patrick Chassé of Northeast Harbor.

Chiltern, Residence of Edgar T. Scott, Bar Harbor, 1896, 1901-12
Lych Gate, Seal Harbor, 1897
Residence of Dr. E.K. Dunham, Seal Harbor, 1898
Residence of E.C. Bodman, Seal Harbor, 1900
Residence of H.R. Hatfield, Bar Harbor, 1900
Residence of Robert Abbe, Bar Harbor, 1901
Residence of George S. Bowdoin, Bar Harbor, 1902
Residence of E.G. Fabbri, Bar Harbor, 1903
Residence of William F. Apthorp, Halls Cove, 1906
Reef Point, Residence of Beatrix Farrand, Bar Harbor, 1914-28
Residence of Frank Bailey Rowell, Bar Harbor, 1917
Tanglewold, Residence of Mrs. A. Murray Young, Bar Harbor, 1917
Residence of Mrs. Dave Hennen Morris, Bar Harbor, 1919
Residence of Mrs. F.B. Richard, Blue Hill, 1919
Residence of Mrs. Hanna, Seal Harbor, 1920
Stoney Point, Residence of Edwin Corning, Northeast Harbor, 1921
Eastholm, Residence of Richard M. Hoe, Seal Harbor, 1921-24

Residence of Mrs. Herbert L. Satterlee, Bar Harbor, 1921-39
Village Green and Athletic Field, Bar Harbor, 1922
Residence of Mrs. A.G. Thacher, Bar Harbor, 1922
Residence of Parker Corning, Bar Harbor, 1923-25
Residence of Mildred McCormick, Bar Harbor, 1923-28
Residence of Walter Ayer, Bar Harbor, 1924-25
Seal Harbor Green, Seal Harbor, 1924
The Haven, Residence of Gerrish H. Milliken, Northeast Harbor, 1925-45
Residence of Mrs. Gerrish Beale, Bar Harbor, 1926
Residence of Jacob S. Disston, Northeast Harbor, 1926
Residence of Mrs. Bradford Fraley, Northeast Harbor, 1926
Residence of Robert McCormick, Bar Harbor, 1926-36
The Eyrie Garden, Residence of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Seal Harbor, 1926-50
Residence of Mrs. Charlton Yarnall, Northeast Harbor, 1926-27
Residence of William Pierson Hamilton, Bar Harbor, 1927-28
Residence of Mrs. Morris Hawkes, Bar Harbor, 1927-28
Residence of Mrs. Vance McCormick, Northeast Harbor, 1927-35
Rockhurst, Residence of Charles E. Sampson, Bar Harbor, 1927-36
Acadia National Park, Carriage Roads for John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Mount Desert Island, 1928-41
Residence of Mrs. Byrne, Bar Harbor, 1928
Residence of Potter Palmer, Bar Harbor, 1928-29
Residence of E.T. Stotesbury, Bar Harbor, 1928-31
Residence of Mrs. Gano Dunn, Sutton Island, 1929
Residence of Henry Rawle, Northeast Harbor, 1929-30
Residence of W. Barton Eddison, Northeast Harbor, 1930
Arnold House, Residence of Harry G. Haskell, Northeast Harbor, 1931
Northeast Harbor Tennis Club, Northeast Harbor, 1932-34
St. Saviors Church, Bar Harbor, 1944
Guest House of David Rockefeller, Seal Harbor, 1949
Capitol Park, Augusta
Residence of Miss Charlotte Baker, Bar Harbor
Residence of Robert P. Bowler, Bar Harbor
Residence of Eugene S. Bristol, Bar Harbor
Residence of Mrs. Alfred Coates, Bar Harbor
Residence of Miss Lucy Frelinghuysen, Northeast Harbor
Residence of C.A. Herter, Seal Harbor
Kane Memorial Bridge, Bar Harbor
Residence of Mrs. Morris McCormick, Bar Harbor
Woodlands, Residence of William S. Moore, Bar Harbor
Residence of Henry Morganthau, Bar Harbor
Mount Desert Island Hospital, Bar Harbor
Residence of Mrs. James B. Murphy, Seal Harbor
Residence of Mrs. Charles T. Pike, Bar Harbor
Residence of Roland Taylor, Northeast Harbor
Residence of Mrs. Archibald Courley Thatcher, Northeast Harbor

Photograph of Beatrix Farrand
Courtesy of the Trustees of Harvard University,
Dumbarton Oaks

Volume VI, 1991

Published by
Maine Citizens for Historic Preservation
Box 1198, Portland, Maine 04104

Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., Editor
Roger G. Reed, Associate Editor